

and helps bring jobs home to the 10th District, which so desperately needs them.

That being said, there are several aspects about this bill that need to be resolved. One of my major areas of concern is that of the environment. Madam Speaker, the bill would open a portion of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, also referred to as ANWR, to oil and gas drilling. For over 50 years, the development of ANWR has been debated greatly. We have an obligation to be good stewards of our national treasures and fiscally responsible in funding our Nation's infrastructure. However, including the Arctic refuge drilling provision will greatly complicate the transportation bill moving forward and make agreement with the Senate far more difficult. ANWR should be the last resort, not the first one.

I'm also concerned with the future sustainability of transit funding. In the Chicagoland region, we depend on mass transit to lessen the congestion on our roads and to get people to and from work. We do this far more efficiently with mass transit. Fifty percent more people would be on area highways and interstates if it were not for mass transit.

So think about that. For the people back there that have driven through Chicago, if we were to add an additional 50 percent on the already congested roads, it would make life far more difficult for moving goods and services around and for getting people to and from work. This is not what we need. Mass transit is a vital program and one that we need to preserve. We need to have the certainty out there for funding. In Illinois, our State will face a \$137 million shortfall each and every year if this bill is enacted as it stands right now. This is unacceptable.

With all this being said, I believe that we have much to do, and we can work together to build a transportation bill that gives States the ability to plan for the long term and complete projects faster. But we do not need to do so at the detriment of mass transit or the environment. So let's work together and make this a better bill that we can all be proud of and move our country forward.

□ 1030

#### CRISIS OF POVERTY IN AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. LEE of California. Madam Speaker, as a founder and cochair of the Congressional Out of Poverty Caucus, I rise again to sound the alarm about the crisis of poverty in America.

While many of us are encouraged by the recent improvements in the unemployment rate, which fell to 8.3 percent, the rate of unemployment continues to be unacceptably high, especially for communities of color. For African Americans, the unemployment

rate is 13.6 percent, and it's 10.5 percent for Latinos. The rate of unemployment for our youth is even more alarming, with over 23 percent of 16-19 year olds looking for a job. Without a job, Madam Speaker, how can we expect our youth, the future of this country, to develop the skills and experience they need to succeed and live out their American Dream.

Encouragingly, President Obama understands that we cannot speed up economic recovery without investments that create jobs. I was pleased to see in his 2013 budget proposal critical investments to create good jobs and job training programs for communities hardest hit by our struggling economy. By targeting economic assistance where it's most needed, the President's proposed budget goes a long way to level the playing field to give every American the opportunity to succeed.

There's a lot that my Republican colleagues can learn from the President's budget, especially this: that fighting poverty and reducing the deficit can be achieved together. But let me be clear. This budget is not perfect. There are cuts in this budget that would undermine some of the progress our economy is making. Cuts to safety net programs like the Community Services Block Grant, Low Income Heating Assistance, and affordable housing programs will hit already struggling families especially hard.

During these difficult times, we really do need to protect programs that are a lifeline for the most vulnerable. We need to increase funding for programs like SNAP and WIC which keep millions of American families out of poverty. But keeping people from suffering the worst effects of poverty is not enough to restore our economy. Even with the recent increases we have seen in job creation, long-term unemployment remains at record levels, with 5.5 million workers who have been out of work for 27 weeks or more. Until Republican leaders in the House can pass President Obama's American Jobs Act or put forth any kind of reasonable plan for job creation, we must ensure that the safety net is strong.

So, Madam Speaker, again I call for an immediate up-or-down vote on Congressman BOBBY SCOTT's and my bill, H.R. 589, which will give the millions of job seekers who continue to struggle to find a job just 14 more weeks of vital unemployment benefits. This would allow them to have just a little more time to find a good job and to support their family while our fragile economy continues to recover.

Also, Madam Speaker, this Congress has a lot of work to do. We are just a few days away from when unemployment benefits are set to expire for millions of Americans across the country. Low-income families were hardest hit during the recession, and they cannot afford another year of a Republican Congress that fails to focus on jobs, refuses to strengthen our middle class, and tries to end the Medicare guar-

antee for all of our seniors. It is incumbent upon this conference committee to ensure that the bridge is strong enough to deliver us all, even our most vulnerable, over these troubled waters.

Madam Speaker, let's put our Nation before our party. Americans really cannot wait, and neither should this Congress.

#### TRANSPORTATION EMPOWERMENT ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GRAVES) for 5 minutes.

Mr. GRAVES of Georgia. Madam Speaker, we're hearing a lot about transportation this week in the form of the transportation reauthorization bill. That causes us to maybe reflect back. Why are we reauthorizing something, and where did it originate, and what is our plan forward?

In fact, this comes from decades and decades and decades ago, and it's a chance when we can say to ourselves: Are we on the right path? Is this the right path for this Congress and the future of our Nation?

I think back to the last election cycle when the American people said we want to see things done just a little bit different, and I want to talk about that just a little bit this morning because today, when it comes to transportation, all States pay 18.4 cents per gallon for every gallon of gas they purchase. They send that to the Federal Government, and the Federal Government is distributing that out across the country.

Now, a lot of people would say that comes back to our States, doesn't it? Well, in fact, it does not. There are 28 States in this Nation that send money to the Federal Government and don't get it all back, Georgia being one of them, along with many others throughout the country. We're referred to as the donor States.

So, in addition to these 28 States not getting back all of their money, there are all of these mandates that occur to each and every one of these States. So as we can imagine, these 28 States, they want to get back all of their money. In fact, Georgia sent a resolution to Congress, and I want to read a section of it here and then submit it for the RECORD, because the Georgia General Assembly said that this body, meaning the Georgia General Assembly, urges the Federal Government to cease the collection of motor fuel taxes in Georgia so that the State can collect and distribute the taxes without the delay caused by the Federal collection and disbursement.

So Georgia and many other States are asking for changes. They're asking for the Federal Government to do something just a little different, but yet we're entering into this debate about reauthorization when maybe we just need to rethink the program altogether.

In Georgia, \$800 million was not received by the State of Georgia. It was